

Women in Ancient Rome

HTANSW

Syllabus content

Stage 4, Year 7, The Ancient World (Depth Study 2 The Mediterranean World: Option 2c Rome)

Duration

One lesson

Rationale

The following activities are designed to promote an appreciation for some of the challenges in investigating women's history. Ideally, students have already been introduced to Roman social hierarchy and are familiar with terminologies such as 'patrician' and concepts such as slavery. It is important that students do not think of Roman women as one homogenous group but appreciate that a woman's life was very much determined by her social status.

Learning aims

Describe the roles of women in ancient Roman society.

Lesson outline

Activity 1: Who, When, Where, Why, What?

Read Source A closely and complete the table questions below.

Source A

If you give women equal freedom with men, do you think this will make them easier to live with?
Far from it! If women have equality, they will become men's masters.

*Cato the Elder to the Roman Senate in 195 BCE
(in Livy, History of Rome, Book 34, c.29 BCE).*

Source A - Teacher notes

Aspects of this source worth highlighting with your students include (but are not limited to):

- The use of a rhetorical question, a device quite characteristic of persuasive language modes. As Cato is delivering a speech in the Senate, the use of rhetoric is reflective of the political context. It is also worth noting that women were excluded from this space.
- The use of exclamation, indicating Cato feels very passionate.
- The source reflects the patriarchal attitude that women are not entitled to equality.
- The comment 'do you think this will make them easier to live with?' suggests that Cato views women as a burden and/or difficult by nature.
- Cato seems to acknowledge that women have a great potential for power: 'they will become men's masters.'
- The fact that female equality is the subject of debate in an ancient Roman context is fascinating.

Questions and sample responses

<p>WHO? Who created this source? What is their name, gender and occupation? Why is this important?</p>	<p>The quote was delivered by Cato the Elder, a Roman male and politician, to the Roman Senate. It was recorded by Livy, a Roman male and historian. This is important because both men were Roman and in powerful positions, so we can reasonably assume these opinions reflect wider Roman attitudes.</p>
<p>WHEN? When was this source created? Is it a primary or secondary source? Why is this important?</p>	<p>Cato's speech was originally delivered in 195 BCE and recorded by Livy circa 29 BCE, approximately 166 years later. However, as both men were ancient Roman, this source is a primary source for historians investigating attitudes towards Roman women.</p>
<p>WHERE? Where was this source created?</p>	<p>Cato's speech was delivered in the Roman Senate, a great centre of political power and place from which women were excluded.</p>
<p>WHY? Why was this source created?</p>	<p>Cato made this speech to persuade Roman politicians to continue denying women freedom. Livy recorded this speech as he considered it an important moment in Roman history.</p>
<p>WHAT? What evidence does this source provide about what Cato thought of women?</p>	<p>The source indicates that Cato believed that Roman women had great potential for power and that Roman women were not deserving of the same freedoms Roman men enjoyed. He argues that women should not be given equality, otherwise 'they will become men's masters.' The fact that Livy is recording this speech suggests he believes it was an important moment in Roman social and political history.</p>

Activity 2: Mind Map

As a class, develop a mind map addressing the question:

Why might it be difficult for historians to investigate the lives of ancient Roman women?

Guiding questions (should students require support in developing responses).


Alternatively, these may be supplied as a 'Think, Share, Pair' activity:


1. What types of sources might exist that help us to investigate the lives of Roman women? Do you think more archaeological or more written sources created by or for Roman women have survived?
2. Most written sources were created by Roman men. How might this impact the way that Roman women were described?
3. What types of historical events do you think Roman men liked to record? Do you think these activities might have included women? Why or why not? If women did participate, do you think their involvement would be described fairly by Roman men? Why or why not?
4. Do you think all Romans could read and write? Which Romans do you think were more likely to write? Do you think all Roman women could read and write? Which Roman women do you think were more likely to write? How might this impact the way the lives of Roman women were recorded?



Activity 3: Viewing comprehension

Watch the following videos and complete the activities.

<p>'Four Sisters in Ancient Rome' – Ray Laurence (TED-Ed, 2014) 9 mins https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ROMgLxVxsrw&t=85s</p> 	<p>Record:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Three things that you learned about the lives of Roman girls.</i> • <i>Two things that you found surprising.</i> • <i>One question that you have about the lives of Roman girls.</i> <p>Optional research task: Locate artefacts that might have belonged to Roman women. What can we learn from these objects?</p> <p>TED-ED learning resources accessible via: https://ed.ted.com/lessons/four-sisters-in-ancient-rome-ray-laurence</p>
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<p>'Who were the Vestal Virgins, and what was their job?' – Peta Greenfield (TED-Ed, 2018) 5 mins https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ER0Cu0KQFqM</p> 	<p>Answer the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How many Vestal Virgins were there in Rome? 2. From which social class were Vestal Virgins selected? 3. Outline the duties of Vestal Virgins. 4. Explain the importance of Vestal Virgins. 5. If you were a Roman girl, would you want to be a Vestal Virgin? Explain your response. <p>TED-Ed learning resources accessible via: https://ed.ted.com/lessons/who-were-the-vestal-virgins-and-what-was-their-job-peta-greenfield#digdeeper</p>
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Activity 4: PEEL paragraph

Using Source B, and your own knowledge, explain the role of women in Ancient Rome.

<p>Source B</p> <p>Roman women had a very limited role in public life. They could not attend, speak in, or vote at political assemblies and they could not hold any position of political responsibility. Whilst it is true that some women with powerful partners might influence public affairs through their husbands, these were the exceptions.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>M. Cartwright, The Role of Women in Ancient Rome (2014)</i></p>
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<p>POINT One to two sentences answering the question directly and outlining your argument.</p>	<p><i>In ancient Rome, women were considered... However, their role varied depending on their...</i></p>
<p>EXPLAIN Four to five sentences of historical detail demonstrating your knowledge of the role of women in Ancient Rome.</p>	<p><i>Some of their responsibilities included...</i> <i>Wealthier women, such as those from the...class fulfilled various roles, including... which required...</i> <i>However, poorer women, such as ... or... would contribute to society by...</i></p>
<p>EVIDENCE Discussion of Source B and what it reveals about the role of women in Ancient Rome.</p>	<p><i>According to Source B... this is significant because...</i></p>
<p>LINK One to two sentence summary, restating your main ideas.</p>	<p><i>Therefore, the role of women in ancient Rome was...</i></p>

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